

OTHER NOTICES

Helen R. Downes. *The Chemistry of Living Cells.* London, 1955. Longmans Green. By arrangement with Harper & Brothers, New York. Pp. x + 549. Price 45s.

BIOCHEMISTRY is perhaps the most rapidly advancing of all biological sciences today, and most biologists at one time or another are forced to consider things in biochemical terms. A readable, concise, and up-to-date general survey of the subject is therefore likely to be of considerable help to the biologist who has only a passing acquaintance with modern ideas in this field, but who requires accurate background information to help him assess the significance of detailed biochemical papers and results bearing on his own particular work. For this purpose Dr. Helen R. Downes's book is eminently suitable.

It is divided into three sections. Part I, after a brief historical introduction, contains an important and clearly written account of those physico-chemical properties of solutions on which a great deal of biochemical reasoning turns. Part II covers the chemistry of the carbohydrates, fats, proteins, and related compounds of biochemical importance. It also includes a useful discussion of enzymes and of the theories of their action. Part III is devoted to a detailed consideration of cell metabolism. The emphasis is on chemical reactions which are characteristic of all types of cells rather than with the specific features of human or mammalian tissues.

The whole work is remarkably up to date. At the end of each chapter there is a useful bibliography of key papers and monographs to which the reader may turn if he wishes to extend his knowledge in any particular direction.

H. HARRIS.

Pilkington, Roger. *The Facts of Life. A Family Doctor* Booklet. London, 1956. British Medical Association. Pp. 31. Price 1s.

THE buyers of *Family Doctor* should consider themselves fortunate: they were given free an excellent booklet, now sold separately for the small sum of one shilling, entitled *The Facts of Life*. Wittily illustrated by Jacqueline Van de Sande, Dr. Roger Pilkington, in some thirty or so pages, instructively and entertainingly describes the process of sexual growth, ostensibly for the young, but, as the author himself points out, there is much to be learnt by all grown ups save those who "pretend that they know absolutely everything."

The real virtue of this little book lies in the fact that the author carries out what he sets out to do,

no mean achievement in this field. He does describe "the facts of life" straightforwardly and unemotionally in a style which, although conversational, friendly and often amusing, never degenerates into the familiar, the embarrassing or the facetious. "Starting with an egg" Dr. Pilkington goes on to "Being born," "Boys and girls are different," the "Meaning of mating," "What fertilization means," ending up with "Humans are different" and "How heredity works." He shirks nothing, not even the father's part in procreation about which many parents find it hard to tell their children. The only possible criticism of Dr. Pilkington's account is that he perhaps minimizes the difficulties which often accompany puberty and childbirth. Maybe, however, this is for the best in view of the importance of the emotional and mental approach at these times.

Besides dealing with the subject unshirkingly and fully, Dr. Pilkington's method of presentation is original and attractive. He relates the physical growth and sexual development and behaviour of human beings to the animal world, stage by stage. He does this in such a way that the human being feels flattered that he has something in common with so charming a bird as the Adelie penguin of the Antarctic, who in the mating season hopefully picks up a round stone and lays it at the feet of a female, and also with the affectionate male stickleback who guards his young so well that at the approach of an enemy he sucks them into his mouth, releasing them only when the danger has disappeared. Dr. Pilkington just as skilfully points out the differences between animals and human beings. He then proceeds to relate these differences in nature to the physical and social conditions of life as it has to be lived in the modern world. From this analysis there emerges a pattern of what might be called a standard of desirable behaviour which, based as it is upon the realities of nature and of life, might well be acceptable to the young of today.

DOREEN AGNEW.

Sainsbury, Peter. *Suicide in London: An Ecological Study.* Maudsley Monographs No. 1. London, 1955. Chapman and Hall for the Institute of Psychiatry. Pp. 116. Price 15s.

THE rôle of social factors in the causation of suicide has long been recognized, but there are only very few studies of suicide in circumscribed areas. Such knowledge is essential for the planning of preventive measures which cannot be based on general observations however well founded. This

is the first ecological study of suicide in London. It is based on the assumption that in a big city it is possible to differentiate neighbourhoods with particular social characteristics related to the degree of social mobility and social isolation prevailing within them. The investigation was designed to test the hypothesis that where the latter two factors were pronounced there would be an increase in the suicide rates. Two complementary investigations were undertaken: (1) A statistical correlation of suicide rates in the twenty-eight Metropolitan boroughs with selected indices of their social characteristics derived from data collected in a recent survey of London and in the 1931 census; (2) An analysis of social and other information pertaining to 409 suicides reported to the Coroner of North London during a three-year period, i.e. 1936-1938. The author found a significant correlation of suicide rates with indices of the following social characteristics: social isolation (i.e. persons living alone and in boarding houses); social mobility (i.e., daily turn-over of population and number of immigrants into the borough); and two of the indices of social disorganisation (divorce and illegitimacy). Suicide tended to increase in the middle class and decrease with poverty. These associations were corroborated when the distribution of the 409 suicides reported in North London was plotted on the map. The rates of suicide were found to be increased by social conditions which led to a sudden fall in the standard of living. Although the suicide rates among the unemployed were found to be significantly higher than among the corresponding employed population, borough unemployment rates showed no correlation with the suicide rates. This was attributed to the fact that both suicide and unemployment are separate consequences of a general social disturbance.

Only in 25 per cent of the cases surveyed were there indications of an abnormal personality. The author does not believe that abnormal personalities feel drawn into certain areas of big towns. He assumes that, on the contrary, an unsettled neighbourhood impoverishes the personality and thus helps to provide the conditions for suicidal

acts. Only in a third of the cases was mental illness the principal cause of suicide. There was a significant correlation between the borough rates for suicide and those for mental disorder. The author believes that the same order of social factors responsible for high suicide rates in the boroughs may also account for high mental disorder rates.

This is an important study, well executed and presented. It is the first of a monograph series published under the ægis of the Institute of Psychiatry of London University and named after the founder of the Maudsley Hospital with which the Institute is closely associated. The first issue augurs well for the success of this new enterprise.

E. STENGEL (SHEFFIELD).

Smith, E. Parkinson and Ikin, A. Graham. *Sex Problems and Personal Relationships*. London, 1956. Heinemann Medical Books. Pp. ix + 145. Price 10s.

THIS book endeavours to give the current Christian attitude towards sexual and marital relationships. It is in two parts. The first deals with the problems of the single adolescent and the newly wedded pair, the second deals with problems of later life and is sometimes rather lacking in clarity of thought and at other times is definite where certainty does not exist. On page eighty-three the author rightly emphasises that "sex attraction" *per se* is not enough for harmony in sex relations and goes on to say that "It is important, too, not to have the same kind of faults. For example, if two untidy people marry, they will always tend to blame each other for the general untidiness, and peace will fly out of the window." But surely it is more probable for a pair with similar "faults" (as viewed by outsiders) to be extremely well matched so far as their own happiness is concerned.

However, the book is one which could be read with advantage by those for whom it is intended, if only as a preliminary for more comprehensive works.

C. W. USHER.